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ABSTRACT

This report discusses preliminary findings of Project "Getting Up to Spe-ed", a project designed to ensure undergraduate education students are well versed in inclusionary practices and endowed with the skills necessary to make appropriate modifications, to inform undergraduate faculty of the latest rules/regulations and trends regarding students with disabilities, and to revise undergraduate core courses and courses in teaching methods to include techniques to modify instructional and assessment strategies for students with disabilities. To meet these goals, a 2-day workshop was provided for faculty involved in the training of preservice teachers. The workshops focused on current information regarding special education policies and teaching assessment strategies effective for students with disabilities included in the regular classrooms. During the workshop, revisions to existing core courses and methods courses to reflect the workshop themes took place. At the end of the fall term, students enrolled in the teacher-education courses were given the attitude toward inclusion instrument to determine changes in overall attitudes following the faculty enhancement workshop and course revisions. Results of analysis to date indicate the longer students are enrolled in the elementary education program, the more positive are their attitudes toward including special education students in regular classes. (Contains 12 references.) (CR)

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Project "Getting Up to Spe-ed": Preliminary Findings

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PROJECT "GETTING UP TO SPE-ED": PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

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Project Overview

In the Spring of 1998, the project authors received a college of education research grant to assess preservice teachers' attitudes toward the placement of students with disabilities in inclusion classes. An attitude toward inclusion instrument was administered to participating students enrolled in teacher-education courses. A baseline of data regarding students' attitudes was obtained and analyzed. Then the authors facilitated a two day summer workshop for faculty involved in the training of the preservice teachers. The workshop focused on current information regarding special education policies and teaching/assessment strategies effective for students with disabilities included in the regular classroom. Special education resource persons, to include classroom teachers, a principal, and a parent, conducted the training. During the workshop, revisions to existing Core courses (beginning education courses) and (subject area) methods courses to reflect the workshop themes took place. These revisions were put in place in the fall, 1998 term. At the end of the fall term, 1998, students enrolled in teacher-education courses were given the attitude toward inclusion instrument. The authors want to determine any changes in students' attitudes overall following the faculty enhancement workshop and course revisions.

Goals

Project "Getting Up to Spe-ed" contains three main objectives. 1) To insure that undergraduate education students are well-versed in inclusionary practices, sensitive to the needs of students with disabilities, and endowed with skills necessary to make appropriate modifications for the diverse learners in K-12 classrooms. 2) To inform undergraduate faculty, particularly those who teach methods courses, of the latest rules/regulations and trends regarding students with disabilities and of teaching strategies appropriate for meeting the learning needs of

these students within the regular classroom. 3) To revise undergraduate Core courses and courses in teaching methods to include techniques to modify instructional and assessment strategies for students with disabilities.

Rationale

Nearly 4.7 million school children with disabilities (approximately 10% of the total student population) during the 1993-1994 school year have been reported by the United States Department of Education (USDE, 1995). Many of these students receive instruction in a special education classroom, but for many the least restrictive environment is the general education classroom, a practice commonly called inclusion. Inclusion represents the belief that students with disabilities, whether or not they meet traditional curricular standards, should be integrated into the regular classroom (Friend & Bursuck, 1996).

With the current emphasis on inclusion, classroom teachers are expressing concerns about their lack of skills to meet the needs of a diverse student population. According to Goodlad and Field (1993), general education teachers view themselves as inadequately prepared to teach students with special needs. First year teachers felt their teacher preparation was ineffective to teach students with disabilities (Williams, 1990).

Thousand and Villa (1995) cite teachers' negative and faulty beliefs, teachers' misconceptions of learners, inappropriate school policies (e.g., tracking), poor administrative leadership, and resistance to change as deep barriers to successful inclusion programs. Most of these barriers could be addressed more fully in general education teacher preparation programs.

Two types of special education course work is often required for general education teachers. One course focuses on legislation and characteristics of special education students. The other emphasizes how modifications can be made to curriculum and instructional practice (Jones & Messenheimer-Young, 1989). A third type of course to include educational partnerships is advocated by Welch and Sheridan (1993). Strawderman and Lindsey's approach (1995) calls for an infusion of special education course work into existing courses; field

experience with special populations, and cross-disciplinary training. The summer workshop/faculty enhancement opportunity addressed the first and second components.

Data Collection

Prior to the faculty workshop, in late April, 1998, students in sections of the targeted courses were given a test (Attitude Toward Inclusion Instrument) to ascertain the general attitudes of students toward the inclusion of special education children in regular education settings. The instrument consists of 30 questions which the respondents answer three times based on the following definitions:

1. Inclusion refers to the practice of attending the same schools as siblings and neighbors, being in general education classrooms with chronological age-appropriate classmates, having individualized and relevant objectives, and being provided with the necessary support (e.g. special education and related services) to learn.

2. Mild/Moderate: This classification includes individuals with mild or moderate mental retardation, learning disabilities, orthopedic impairments, sensory impairments, or speech impairments.

3. Severe/Profound or Multiple Disabilities: Severe/profound includes all those students with severe mental retardation while multiple disabilities refers to a combination of impairments.

4. Emotionally Disturbed/Behavior Disordered: This category includes all those students with emotional disturbances or disorders which cause a student to exhibit behavior which may be problematic within the classroom.

The workshop, held in August, 1998, was attended by 14 faculty members. In December, 1998, students in sections of the targeted courses were given the same test as students took in the spring.

Data Analysis

Sum scores on each portion of the test given before and after course revisions will be compared to determine any change in faculties' and students' attitudes in general. Scores will be analyzed according to the age and/or gender of the respondents as well as by major, standing,

and course title. Higher scores indicate a positive attitude toward including students with the identified category of disability in the regular classroom. At this time, only scores from Spring, 1998 have been studied.

Results of Analysis to Date

Females had significantly higher scores (more positive attitudes) on 'severe' than males.

$n = 205$; $r_{pb} = 0.138$; $p = .049$

There is a significant difference in relationship for all three categories and students enrolled in course, 5200:245 'Understanding Language Literacy' (mostly sophomores & juniors) and course, 5200:345 'Teaching language Literacy" (mostly juniors & seniors). The mean scores of these groups were significantly different. This difference suggests that the longer students are enrolled in the elementary education program, the more positive are their attitudes toward including special education students in regular classes.

The researchers were not surprised that there is a significant positive correlation between special education majors and categories of

'mild' $n = 215$; $r = 0.166$; $p = .015$ and 'severe' $n = 215$; $r = 0.186$; $p = .006$

'emotion' $n = 215$; $r = 0.216$; $p = .002$

The longer students are enrolled in the elementary education program, the more positive are their attitudes toward inclusion. There is a significant positive correlation between 'standing' (length of time in the program) and categories of 'mild' $n = 170$; $r = 0.245$; $p = .001$ and 'severe' $n = 170$; $r = 0.208$; $p = .006$ There is a significant positive correlation between 'seniors' and categories of 'mild' $n = 215$; $r = 0.152$; $p = .026$ and 'severe' $n = 215$; $r = 0.151$; $p = .027$

The researchers found one occurrence of negative attitudes toward inclusion. There is a significant negative correlation between secondary ed. majors and 'mild' $n = 215$; $r = -0.138$; $p = .044$

Evidence of Progress

The response of the participating faculty members to the workshop content and methods was extremely positive. Participants generated a list of recommendations to be shared with

faculty in College of Education. These recommendations include: 1) an increase early-field experience in inclusion classrooms; 2) opportunities to simulate the team-teaching process; 3) class role play of interaction with parents; 4) requiring students to write lesson plans based on IEP's; 5) an increase in opportunities for faculty sharing and communication.

Some changes to course content was evidenced in faculty syllabi for Fall, 1998 courses. These modifications included: 1) the critique of an inclusion article in a language literacy class; 2) the writing of lesson plans aligned to an IEP teaching phonics and science methods classes; 3) discussion about modifying testing procedures in a math methods class.

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